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A Safe Trip Abroad

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A Safe Trip Abroad

Foreward

Foreign travel can be a rich and rewarding experience and the odds are very much in your favor for an incident-free trip.

The individual traveler's chances of having to face the trials and tribulations of losing valuables or coping with an unexpected illness or injury far from home are considerably greater, for instance, than of becoming a victim of violence.

You can narrow the chances even further with an increased awareness of potential problems and careful planning. We hope the following suggestions will help.

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Before You Go

— Learn about the places you plan to visit. Familiarize yourself with local laws and customs in those areas. (Consult your library, a travel agent, airline, or the tourist bureaus of the specific countries you plan to visit.) Keep track as well of what is being reported in the media about any recent developments.

— Don't take anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, expensive jewelry, or irreplaceable family objects.

— Pack an extra set of eyeglasses. Carry these and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage. Take along a copy of the prescription for necessary medicines and the generic name of the drug. Keep medicines in their original labeled container to make customs processing easier. If any medications contain narcotics, carry with you a letter from your physician attesting to your need to take them.

— Lock your luggage, and put your name and address *inside* each piece.

— Make photocopies of your airline ticket, passport identification page, driver's license, and the credit cards you take with you. Leave one set at home and keep another with you in a separate place from these valuables. Leave a copy of the serial numbers of your travelers checks at home; take another with you separate from the checks themselves and, as you cash in the checks, keep a tally of which ones remain unredeemed.

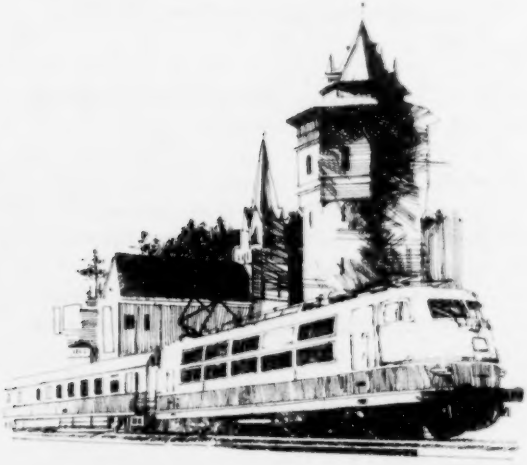
— Leave a copy of your medical and dental records with your family or other contact person. Have your affairs at home in order:

leave an up-to-date will, insurance documents, and a power of attorney with your family, so you can feel secure about traveling and are prepared for any emergency that may occur while you are away. Consider guardianship arrangements for your children.

— Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home should they need to contact you in an emergency.

— Find out from your credit card company what your credit limit is and be sure not to charge over that amount on your trip. Americans have been arrested in some countries for innocently exceeding their limit.

— Find out whether your own insurance will cover you for loss or theft abroad and in case of accident or illness.



Precautions While Traveling

Normal common sense should prevail when traveling abroad, just as it would at home. Be especially cautious in, or avoid situations where you are more likely to be victimized such as crowded subways, train stations, elevators, market places, and festivals. Do not, for instance, get on an elevator alone if there is a suspicious-looking individual inside. You may wish to consider staying in larger hotels that have more elaborate security.

Find out about local rules and obey them. American citizenship cannot protect you if you break the laws of the foreign country you are visiting.

In addition to these common-sense suggestions, keep track of the news to be aware of any potential problems in areas where you may travel. Your own state of alertness and the precautions you take should increase as you travel in areas where the potential for violence or terrorism is greater. Before continuing on to such areas, inquire at the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate whether there are any adverse conditions of which you should be aware. Ask for the American Citizens Service Unit in the consular section. (For general information on travel advisories, see the concluding section of this publication.)

In short, assess your situation and surroundings, and try to remain in that healthy gray area between complacency and paranoia.

Guarding Your Valuables

— Carry travelers checks instead of cash. Change some checks for local currency before you leave or upon arrival. Don't flash large amounts of money when paying

a bill. Only countersign travelers checks in front of the person who will cash them, and be sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction.

— Make sure you receive a claim check for each piece of luggage you check.

— Instead of keeping all your money, airline tickets, passport, and other valuables in your wallet, conceal them in several places to prevent easy theft. Keep them in your accompanying hand-luggage, on your person, or in a hotel safety-deposit box. Do not leave them in your room while you are out.

— Don't leave your bags unattended in public areas. (Traveling light will help.)

— Women should carry handbags in a secure manner to prevent snatch-and-run type thievery, and men should place their wallets in their inside jacket pockets. To guard against thieves on motorcycles, walk on the inside of sidewalks and carry your purse on the side away from the street. Wrapping rubberbands around your wallet or keeping it in a zipped portion of a handbag makes it more difficult for a pickpocket to remove.

— Be wary of con artists. They exist around the world.

— Keep hotel and car keys on your person.

— Be alert to the possibility of street gangs operating in large cities abroad.

— If confronted by superior force, don't fight attackers: give up valuables.

— If any of your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the police and other appropriate authorities. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance

claims and as an explanation of your plight. Also report the loss of:

- travelers checks to the nearest office of the issuing company or its agent.
- airline tickets to the airline company or travel agent.
- passport to the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate.

Personal Security

— Keep a low profile. Dress and behave conservatively, avoiding flashy dress, jewelry, luggage, rental cars, or conspicuous behavior which would draw attention to you as a potentially wealthy or important foreigner.

— Be polite and low-key. Avoid loud conversations and arguments.

— Avoid dangerous areas; don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets. Try not to travel alone at night.

— Let someone know when you expect to return, especially if out late at night.

— Don't give your room number to persons you don't know well. Meet visitors in the lobby.

— Keep your hotel door locked at all times.

— Remember when you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws and are not protected by the U.S. Constitution. Penalties for drug violations, including possession of small amounts of marijuana or cocaine, are severe in many foreign countries and rigorously enforced.

— Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, buy airline tickets, or purchase souvenirs; don't make exchanges for local currency at black market rates. In many countries travelers should refrain from photographing police and military personnel and installations, border areas, and transportation facilities. Be wary about selling personal effects such as clothing or jewelry. The penalties you risk may be severe.

— If possible, book a room between the second and seventh floors—above ground level to prevent easy entrance from outside and low enough for fire equipment to reach.

— Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room, know how to report a fire, and make sure you know where the nearest fire exit and an alternate are. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit—this could be a life-saver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.

— Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate. Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.

— Learn a few phrases in the local language so you can signal your need for help, the police, or a doctor.

Vehicle Security

— Drive the more common kinds of locally available cars; if there are not many American cars in use, don't insist on an American model.

— Make sure the car is in good repair.

— Keep car doors locked at all times.

— Wear seatbelts.

— Don't park your car on the street overnight if the hotel has a garage or secure area. If you must park it on the street, select a well-lit area. Don't leave valuables in the car.

— Never pick up hitchhikers.

— Don't get out of the car if there are suspicious individuals nearby. Drive away.

Protecting Yourself Against the Possibility of Terrorism

Terrorist acts occur in a random and unpredictable fashion which makes it impossible to protect oneself absolutely. The first and best way is to avoid travel to unsafe areas—areas where there has been a persistent record of terrorist attacks or kidnappings. The vast majority of foreign states have a good record of maintaining public order and protecting residents and visitors within their borders from terrorism. Most terrorist attacks are the result of long and careful planning. Just as a car-thief will first be attracted to an unlocked car with the key in the ignition, terrorists are looking for undefended, easily accessible targets who follow predictable patterns. The chances that a tourist, traveling with an unpublicized program or itinerary, would be the victim of terrorism are slight: the random possibility of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In addition, many terrorist groups, seeking publicity for political causes within their own country or region, are not looking for American targets.

Nevertheless, the pointers below may help you avoid becoming an American "target of opportunity." They should be considered as adjuncts to the tips listed in the previous section for ways to protect yourself against the far greater likelihood of falling prey to ordinary criminal activity. The following are additional reasonable precautions which may provide some degree of protection, and can serve as practical and psychological deterrents to would-be terrorists.

— Schedule direct flights if possible. Try to minimize the time spent in the public area of an airport, which is a less protectable area. Move quickly from the check-in counter to the secured areas. On arrival, leave the airport as soon as possible.

— Be aware of what you discuss with strangers, or what may be overheard by others.

— Avoid luggage tags, dress, and behavior which may identify you as an American. While sweatshirts and T-shirts with American university logos are commonly worn throughout Europe, leave other obvious U.S. logos or apparel at home.

— Keep an eye out for suspicious abandoned packages or briefcases. Report them to airport security or other authorities and leave the area promptly.

— Avoid obvious terrorist targets and places where Americans and Westerners are known to congregate.

High-Risk Areas

If you must travel in an area where there has been a history of terrorist attacks or kidnappings, also make it a habit to:

— Discuss with your family what they would do in case of an emergency, in addition to making sure your affairs are in order before leaving home.

— Register with the U.S. Embassy upon arrival.

— Remain friendly, but be cautious about discussing personal matters, your itinerary, or program.

— Leave no personal or business papers in your hotel room.

— Watch for people following you or "loiterers" observing your comings and goings.

— Keep a mental note of safe havens, such as police stations, hotels, and hospitals.

— Let someone else know what your travel plans are. Keep them informed if you make any changes.

— Avoid predictable times and routes of travel, and report any suspicious activity to local police, and the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate.

— Select your own taxicabs at random—don't take a cab which is not clearly identified as a taxi. Compare the face of the driver with the one posted on his license.

— If possible, travel with others.

— Be sure of the identity of visitors before opening the door of your hotel room. Don't meet strangers at unknown or remote locations.

— Refuse unexpected packages.

— Formulate a plan of action for what you will do if a bomb explodes or there is gunfire nearby.

— Check for loose wires or other suspicious activities pertaining to your car.

— Be sure your vehicle is in good operating condition in case you need to resort to high-speed or evasive driving.

— Drive with the windows closed in crowded streets; bombs can be thrown through open windows.

— If you are ever in a situation where somebody starts shooting, drop to the floor or get down as low as possible and don't move until you are sure the danger has passed. Do not attempt to help rescuers and do not pick up a weapon. If possible shield yourself behind or under a solid object. If you must move, crawl on your stomach.

Hijacking/Hostage Situation

While every hostage situation is different and the chance of becoming a hostage is remote, some considerations are important.

The U.S. Government's policy not to negotiate with terrorists is firm—doing so only increases the risk of further hostage-taking by terrorists. When Americans are abducted overseas, we look to the host government to exercise its responsibility under international law to protect all persons within its territories and to bring about the safe release of the hostages. We work closely with these governments from the outset of a hostage-taking incident to ensure that our citizens and other innocent victims are released as quickly and safely as possible.

The most dangerous phases of most hijacking or hostage situations are the beginning and, if there is a rescue attempt, the end. At the outset, the terrorists typically are tense, high-strung, and may behave irrationally. It is extremely important that you remain calm and alert and manage your own behavior.

— Avoid resistance and sudden or threatening movements. Do not struggle or try to escape unless you are certain of being successful.

— Make a concerted effort to relax. Breathe deeply and prepare yourself mentally, physically, and emotionally for the possibility of a long ordeal.

— Try to remain inconspicuous, avoid direct eye contact and the appearance of observing your captors' actions.

— Avoid alcoholic beverages. Consume little food and drink.

— Consciously put yourself in a mode of passive cooperation. Talk normally. Do not

complain, avoid belligerency, and comply with all orders and instructions.

— If questioned, keep your answers short. Don't volunteer information or make unnecessary overtures.

— Don't try to be a hero, endangering yourself and others.

— Maintain your sense of personal dignity, and gradually increase your requests for personal comforts. Make these requests in a reasonable low-key manner.

— If you are involved in a lengthier, drawn-out situation, try to establish a rapport with your captors, avoiding political discussions or other confrontational subjects.

— Establish a daily program of mental and physical activity. Don't be afraid to ask for anything you need or want—medicines, books, pencils, papers.

— Eat what they give you, even if it does not look or taste appetizing. A loss of appetite and weight is normal.

— Think positively; avoid a sense of despair. Rely on your inner resources. Remember that you are a valuable commodity to your captors. It is important to them to keep you alive and well.

Assistance Abroad

U.S. consular officers are located at U.S. Embassies and consulates in most countries abroad. Consular officers can advise you of any adverse conditions in the places you are visiting and can help you in emergencies. If you plan more than a short stay in one place or if you are in an area experiencing civil unrest or some natural disaster, it is advisable to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate. This will make it easier should someone at home need to locate you urgently or in the unlikely event that you need to be evacuated due to an emergency. It will also facilitate the issuance of a new passport should yours be lost or stolen.

Should you find yourself in any legal difficulty, contact a consular officer immediately. Consular officers cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice but they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find legal representation. Consular officers cannot get you out of jail. However, if you are arrested, ask permission to notify a consular official—it is your right. American consular officials will visit you, advise you of your rights under local laws, ensure that you aren't held under inhumane conditions, and contact your family and friends for you if you desire. They can transfer money, and will try to get relief for you, including food and clothing in countries where this is a problem. If you become destitute overseas, consular officers can help you get in touch with your family, friends, bank, or employer and inform them how to wire funds to you.

Travel Advisories

The Department of State tries to alert American travelers to adverse conditions abroad—including violence—through the travel advisory program. In consultation with our embassies and consulates overseas, and various bureaus of the Department of State, the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in the Bureau of Consular Affairs issues travel advisories about conditions in specific countries. Advisories generally do not pertain to isolated international terrorist incidents since these can occur anywhere and at any time. The majority of these advisories deal with short-term or temporary difficulties which Americans may encounter when they go abroad. Some mention conditions of political or civil unrest which could pose a threat to personal safety. These types of advisories may be short term in nature, e.g., at the time of a military or political coup. Such advisories are either lifted or amended when the situation no longer poses a threat to travelers.

There are only a few advisories in effect which advise avoiding all travel to a particular country because of a high incidence of terrorism within the region or because a long-term problem exists. Most of the security-related advisories do not recommend against travel to an entire country but suggest avoiding specific areas within a country where unrest is endemic.

Ask about current travel advisories for specific countries at any of the 13 regional U.S. passport agencies and at U.S. Embassies and consulates abroad. Travel advisories are also widely disseminated to interested organizations, travel associations, and airlines.

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Additional Information

The booklet, *Your Trip Abroad*, contains some valuable information on loss and theft of a passport as well as other travel tips. To obtain a copy, write to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. The single copy price is $1.

Country Information Notices provide advice on travel to specific areas of the world. Notices include topics such as currency and customs regulations, entry requirements, dual nationality, import and export controls, vaccination requirements, and drug warnings. Single copies of the following publications are free by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope to Bureau of Consular Affairs, Public Affairs Staff, Room 5807, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520.

- *Tips for Travelers to the Caribbean*
- *Tips for Travelers to Cuba: A U.S. Government Warning*
- *Tips for Travelers to Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia*
- *Tips for Travelers to Mexico*
- *Tips for Travelers to the Middle East*
- *Tips for Travelers to the People's Republic of China*
- *Tips for Travelers to Saudi Arabia*
- *Tips for Travelers to the USSR*

U.S. Embassy Addresses

Key Officers of Foreign Service Posts provides names of key officers and addresses for all U.S. Embassies and consulates abroad. This publication is updated three times a year. The single copy purchase price is $4.25. To obtain a copy, write to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.